

The **PHANTOM**

AND THE SKY PIRATES



THE
**BETTER
LITTLE
BOOK**

THE PHANTOM

and the

Sky Pirates

by Lee Falk
and Ray Moore

*Based on the Famous
Newspaper Strip*

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Captain Horton and Diana Visited

THE PHANTOM

and the Sky Pirates

CHAPTER I

PURPLE LIGHTS

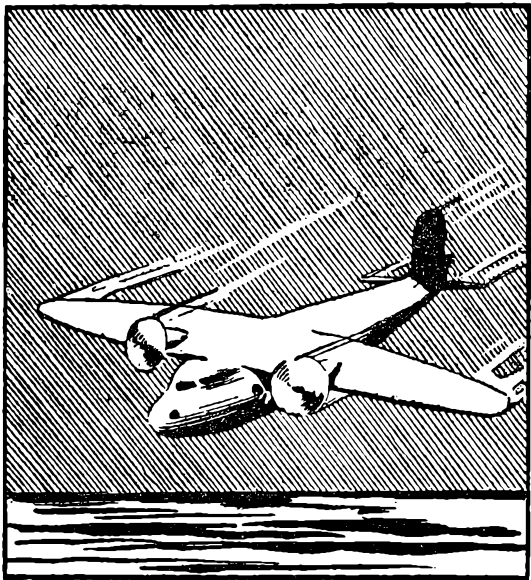
Aboard the *Calcutta Clipper*, lovely Diana Palmer and Captain Melville Horton of the Colonial Service were talking earnestly about the man known as the Phantom.

"You expect me to believe," Diana said, "that he's one of those

Sky Pirates?" She shook her head. "Don't be silly, Mel."

"I know how you feel about him," Horton said slowly, "but he helped Sala escape. And she admitted she was a member of the band. Then, when we put him in jail, he broke out."

Diana smiled. Her eyes moved toward the window. The Clipper was nearing Bassein, but the girl's thoughts were not upon their location. "You didn't think you



The Clipper Neared Bassein

could keep *him* behind bars, did you?" she asked. "Naturally, he'd break out!"

Captain Horton's mouth was stubborn. "I believe he helped you," he said grimly, "and helped us destroy the Singh pirates, just to throw us off the scent. In fact, I told him as much."

"You're an idiot!" Diana cried hotly, then relented. "Mel, I've just got to tell you the *truth* about the Phantom!"



Diana Told the Truth

"I'm listening," Captain Horton leaned forward, and the girl drew a deep breath. The story she had to tell was indeed a strange one.

"I am the only one," she began, "who knows the Phantom's secret. He told me when he asked me to marry him."

"I—see," Horton said, and paused. "Well, why is he mixed up in this Sky business?"

The girl did not answer his



She Revealed the Phantom's Secret

question. She could not. But she was certain the Phantom was not a member of the Sky Band.

“You know,” she said abruptly, “the natives think he’s *immortal*.”

“Is he?”

She smiled again. “Here’s the story. Four hundred years ago, his direct ancestor swore an oath to devote his life to the destruction of all forms of piracy and greed. That man was the *first* Phantom. The iron-bound oath was handed

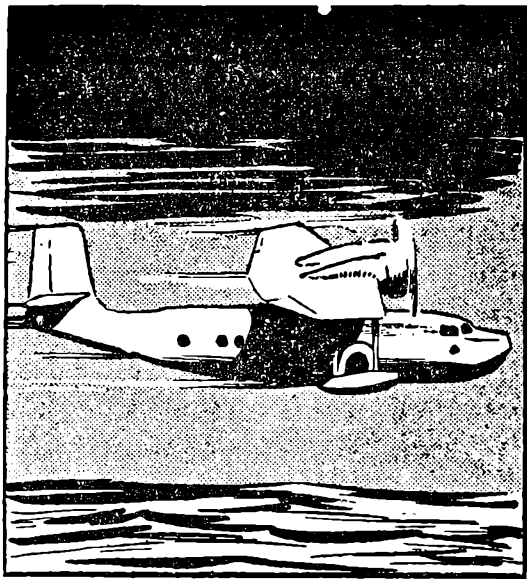


"The Natives Think He's Immortal."

down from father to son. Absolute secrecy was part of the oath. *Our* Phantom is the present member of that family."

Captain Horton frowned, but he was listening. A silence settled between them while the *Clipper* flew on. Diana, Horton and all the others aboard were totally unaware of the disaster which awaited them. The girl continued.

"I told him the oath was silly. But it's sacred to him. Father to



The Clipper Flew Toward Disaster

son—down the line.” She leaned forward. “That’s why the natives of the Orient think the Phantom’s immortal. And that’s why I know the Phantom is not a member of the Sky Band, but is out to destroy them!”

“I’d grown to like him,” Horton said, “but I’m not so sure—,”

“It’s true!” Diana cried, gripping his arm. “You’ve got to believe me, Mel!”

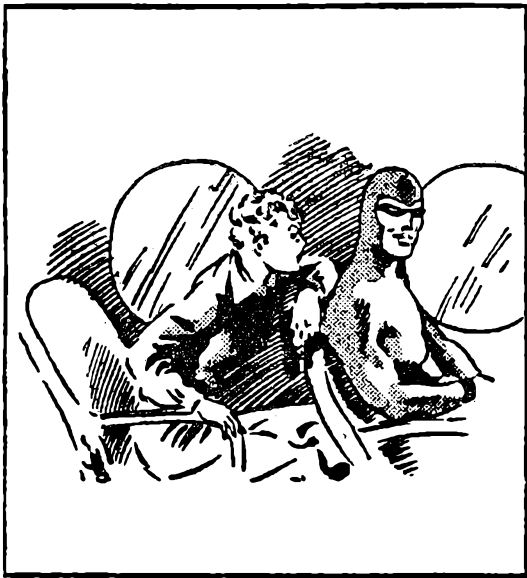
A smile twisted Captain Hor-



"It's True!" Diana Said

ton's mouth. "Diana," he said, "you could make me believe anything."

At that moment, when the lovely dark girl had convinced the Service man of the Phantom's innocence and high purpose, the masked one of whom they spoke was a passenger aboard the Sky Band plane. The leader of the band, a golden-haired woman known as the Baroness was seated behind him. Suddenly she asked, "Don't



The Phantom Was on the Sky Band Plane

you ever take off that get-up?"

"Not often, Baroness. I've worn it so long, it's second nature." The Phantom turned slightly and said, conversationally, over his shoulder, "I suppose we're nearing Bassein by now."

The Baroness came to life. Her eyes glowed. "Any minute now," she said, tensely eager. "Then we strike the *Calcutta Clipper*, and you shall see your Baroness in action!"



The Baroness Promised Action

The Phantom's smile was grim. "I can hardly wait," he said. He had seen the slow, downward movement of her right hand, and knew she was reaching for her automatic. Pretending disinterest, he looked out the window while he heard one of the Sky Band report, "*The Calcutta Clipper* has been sighted."

"Good!" said the Baroness. "Flash the radio warning!" She leaned forward, her eyes as cold as

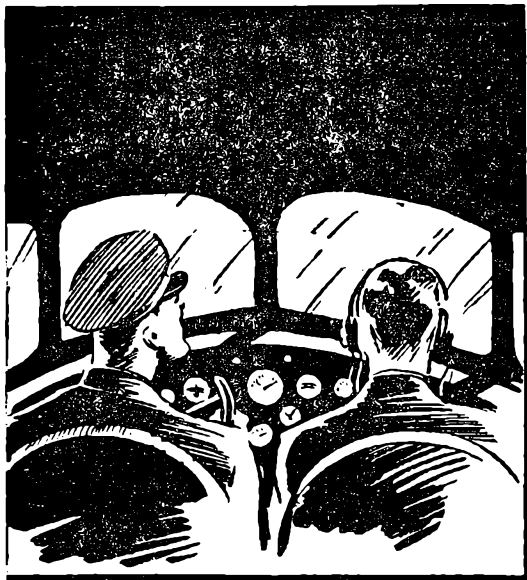


"Watch Your Step!"

the steel in her hands. "Watch your step!" she told the Phantom crisply. "I am fond of you, but I warn you—*watch your step!* As much as I like you, I'll have no hesitancy in shooting you!"

The Phantom nodded. "Yes, I got that, Baroness. I'll be good."

The *Calcutta Clipper* received the warning, "Lower at once or we'll drop you." Moran, the operator, reported to Captain Horton who was justly alarmed.



The Clipper Received the Warning

"Purple lights!" he cried. "That's the Sky Band all right! Get word to Calcutta! Quick! Then give this plane all she's got. Maybe we can keep away from them until help comes!"

The radio operator flashed his report. "Calcutta.. Calcutta. This is Moran. Moran. We're being attacked by Sky Band. Sky Band. Near Bassein. Near Bassein. Sky Band. Near Bassein."

The Sky Band planes dived,



"Calcutta . . . We're Being Attacked."

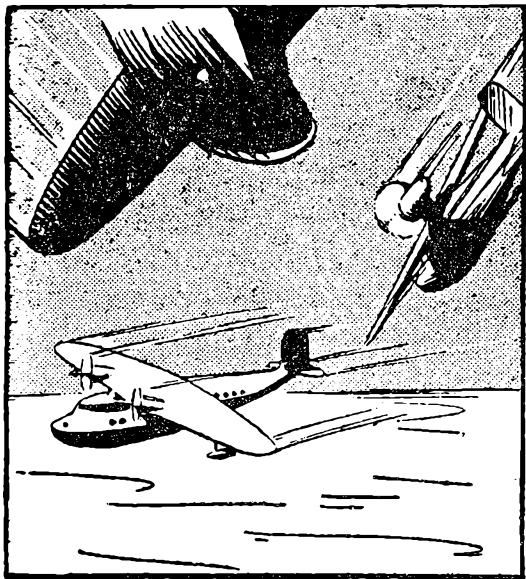
their deadly machine-gun fire raking the *Clipper's* wings.

The besieged plane received another message.

"Lower. Cease further attempts to use radio. This is the last warning."

White-faced, Captain Horton listened while Moran gave the report. The operator added grimly, "I think they mean it."

Horton was of the same opinion. "Yes, I guess they mean busi-



The Sky Band Planes Dived

ness. Their ships are too fast, and with Diana on board—," he broke off and finished savagely, "We haven't a chance against machine guns. Do as they say. Lower to the water."

Captain Horton was a brave man, but as he turned away, a wave of sickening fear swept over him, a sensation of impending disaster which was caused not so much by the gunfire of the pirate planes, but that Diana, somehow, would



"Do As They Say," Said Horton

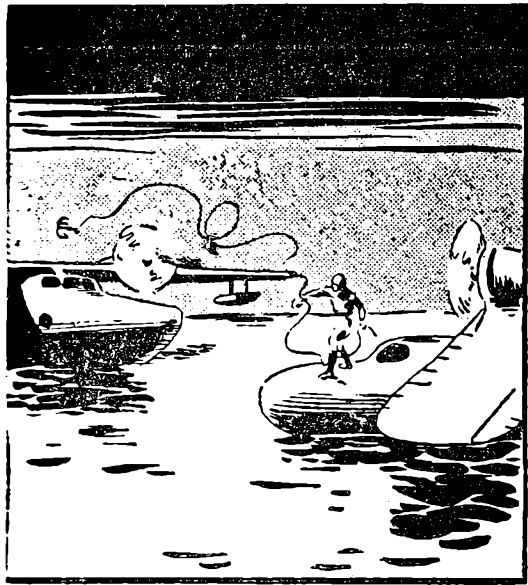
be made to suffer.

The girl was at his side, her dark eyes wide with alarm.

"Oh, Mell!" she said huskily. "Is it the Sky Band?"

He made an attempt to speak reassuringly. "Don't be afraid, Diana," he said.

The *Calcutta Clipper* had obeyed the Sky Band's warning and lowered to the water. The marauding ships pulled alongside, using the time-honored



They Used the Grappling Hook

means of all pirates, the grappling hook.

Horton's hand was protectingly about Diana's shoulder. He repeated again, "Don't be afraid, Diana. They're after loot, nothing more."

The girl was trembling violently. She said, scarcely above a whisper, "I'm—I'm not afraid."

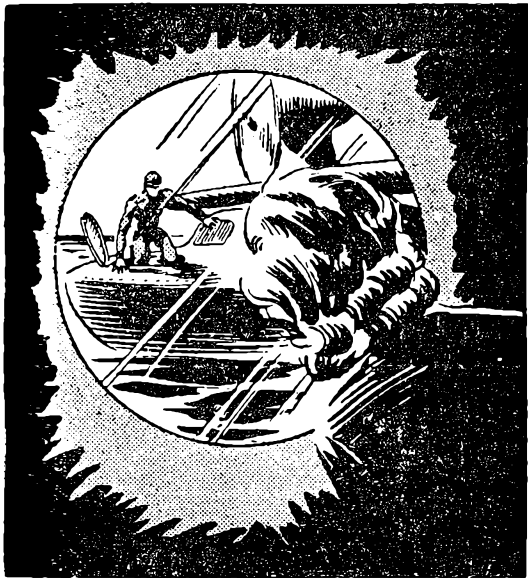
Together they waited for a minute that seemed never to end. Unable to endure the tension longer,



Horton Tried to Reassure Diana

Diana broke away from the kindly arms and moved swiftly to one of the windows. She could see one of the Sky Band planes resting on the surface of the water. This she had expected, but she was totally unprepared for the sight of a dark-clothed figure who emerged.

Her hand went swiftly to her mouth as she tried to stifle her cry. Diana knew beyond a doubt that the Phantom was in the Sky Band plane!



Diana Recognized the Phantom

CHAPTER II

IN COLD BLOOD

Before the Baroness could board the *Clipper* and take control, Captain Horton maneuvered Diana out of sight. Numb with the shock of her discovery, the girl stepped quietly aside. Captain Horton was left to face the golden-haired pirate leader alone.

The man appeared not to no-



The Baroness Took Control

tice the weapon in her hand. He said quietly, sternly, "I am Captain Horton of the Colonial Service. I'm a passenger here. What does this mean?"

"I'm not interested in the story of your life, Captain," the Baroness snapped. "Where's the steward?"

The man came at her request and listened to her demand. He shook his head. "I don't know what you mean by black pearls.

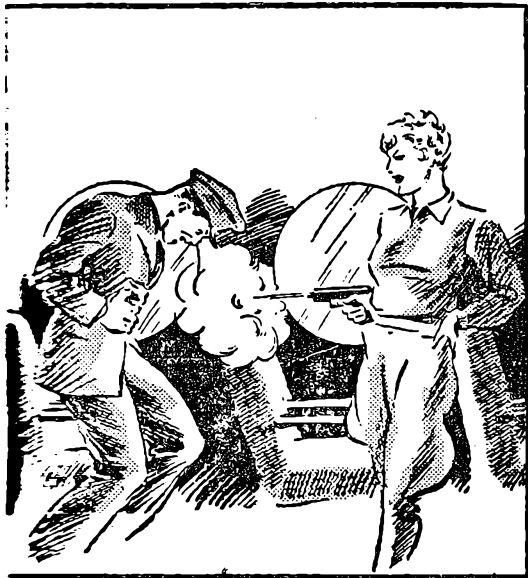


She Demanded the Black Pearls

Somebody musta been kiddin' you along, ma'am. Nothin' like that this trip."

"Don't lie!" the Baroness said coldly. "Hand them over. Twenty-eight matched black pearls, packed in a white velvet box." The weapon came up level with his heart. "I warn you!"

"Put down your gun, girly. You can't scare," the steward said and spoke no more. His voice ended in a muttered cry and his hand



The Steward Gave a Cry

went to his breast. The sound of the shot was very loud in the cabin and the Baroness's icy tone cut through the ensuing silence.

"Men aren't very good liars!"

"But some women are!" It was the Phantom who had spoken. He came in at that moment, not yet having seen Diana. "You promised there would be no shooting!" he accused the Baroness.

Then he faced Horton.

"Horton!" he cried. "What are



The Phantom Faced Horton

you doing here?"

The Colonial Service man regarded him with open contempt.

"I don't suppose I have to ask you the same question," he said witheringly. "It's obvious. You've shown up in your true colors."

The Phantom was about to raise a protesting hand, but held himself rigid, kept his silence.

Captain Horton spat the accusation, "A member of the Sky Band!"



For the First Time, He saw Diana

For the first time, then, the Phantom saw Diana. She rushed to his side. "It's not true!" she protested hotly. "It's not!"

The Phantom gave a start. He spoke her name, but the sound was more like a groan. Diana came closer, placing her two hands on his shoulders.

"To have to meet you again this way!" she cried. "Tell me you're not one of them, one of these murderers! Tell me!"



"You're Not One of Them?"

The masked man stood stiffly. The eyes behind the mask gave her a puzzled look.

"Pardon me," the Phantom said with careful courtesy, "I—I'm having some trouble in placing you." He paused, as though trying to remember. "You're Diana,—Diana Palmer?"

The Baroness had been watching with narrowed eyes. "He's either frightened," she thought, "or trying to bluff. I'll find out."



The Baroness Wished to Talk

She pushed the Phantom aside. "I wish to talk to this woman," she announced. But if she expected Diana to cringe, she was mistaken.

"Oh, you do!" Diana flared. "You shot down that man in cold blood! You—,"

The Baroness cut in with a laugh. "You don't like the way I do things, eh?" Her gun was ready, but Diana ignored it.

"If I hadn't seen it," she said, "I wouldn't believe a woman



Diana Spoke Her Mind

could be so cruel, cold and *low!*”

The Baroness laughed again, not a pleasant sound. She called out, “Mola, Tecla, we’ll take this pasty-faced milksop with us!”

The Phantom intervened. He placed a firm hand on the Baroness’s arm. “Come along, Baroness,” he urged her.

The Baroness did not move. In silence, she regarded the masked man.

“Why bother with this girl?” he



He Urged Her to Leave

said. "There's no time to lose."

"I don't need your help, you contemptible liar!" Diana cried furiously. "You—faker!"

If the Phantom were shaken by her accusations, he did not reveal it. He kept his eyes on the Baroness. She, in turn, looked at him with suspicion.

"Perhaps you like this girl, eh? You would help her?"

"Don't be absurd," he said gruffly. "That radioman got off a



The Baroness Was Suspicious

warning, you know. Besides, you came for the pearls, didn't you?"

That diverted her attention—the pearls. She gave an order and one of the band brought them.

The pearls were all there.

"Good!" The Baroness applauded. "Keep them. I have one little matter to settle.² Then we take off. Be ready."

One little matter to settle, she had said. If the Phantom worried that this would involve Diana, he



The Pearls Were All There

kept his feeling well under control. But when next the Baroness spoke, it was evident he had not anticipated her wily intention.

“You have seen me in action,” she said to the Phantom. “You are pleased? You would kiss me, perhaps? *Now?*”

“Why—,” he murmured, but the Baroness’s arms were about his neck. To Diana, it appeared that the Phantom was very fond of the blond pirate leader, as the Bar-

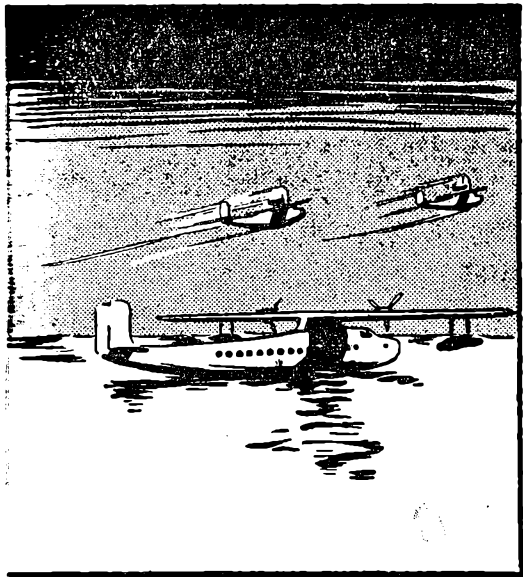


"You Are Pleased?" She Said

oness meant her to believe.

Diana turned away, and was grateful that Captain Horton was at her side. They stood together while the Sky Band took their departure, the Phantom with them.

The Baroness had one last speech to make. "Be thankful that I am in a charitable mood," she told them. "When a woman is in love, she dislikes shooting more people than is absolutely necessary."



The Sky Band Planes Left

She was gone, and soon the Sky Band planes left the *Calcutta Clipper*.

Captain Horton tried his best to comfort the broken-hearted girl.

"I'm sorry, Diana. I know it's tough for you to find him one of the Sky Band."

"I came eight thousand miles," Diana sobbed, "to find—this!"

Neither of them remotely guessed at the truth. The Phan-



Horton Tried to Comfort Diana

tom was returning with the Sky Band to their secret base on the Isle of Herons, but his position was not that of a member.

Some hours later, in the leader's reception room, he stood before the Baroness. She was frowning as she spoke.

"You displeased me greatly when you attempted to order me about. Did you know that girl?"

"Yes—slightly."

One of the band entered bring



The Phantom Had Displeased Her

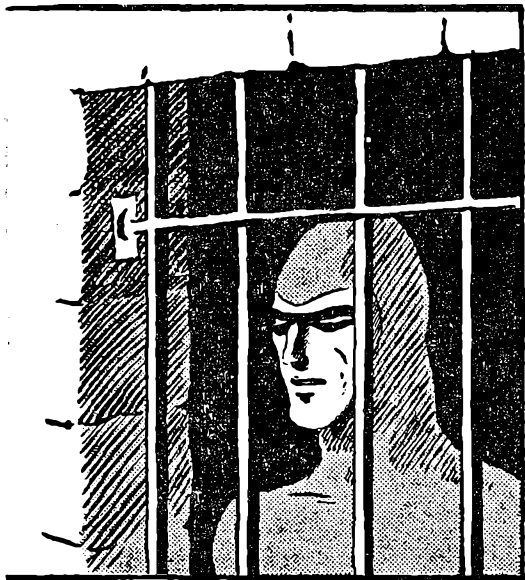
ing the black pearls. As the Baroness took them, the smile returned to her lips.

"These pearls were worth the trouble," she said with satisfaction.

The masked man said nothing. When the Baroness looked at him again, it was the glance a disinterested ruler gives a slave.

"Now," she said, "you'll return to your cell until I send for you."

Back in his cell the Phantom's



The Phantom Was Back in His Cell

reflections were gloomy.

“Of all the women in the world,” he thought, “and all the planes in the world, what was Diana doing on the *Calcutta Clipper*? And Horton? Who *also* loves her! And just as my plans were rounding out so well!” He groaned, muttering, “If I hadn’t kissed the Baroness she’d murdered the crew—including Diana. But can I ever explain to Diana—if I ever see her again?”



"Can I Ever Explain to Diana?"

CHAPTER III

HORTON'S PLAN

The *Clipper*, as was to be expected, made a late arrival at Calcutta. Both the crew and the passengers left the plane in a somber mood, but Diana, deathly pale, was in a trancelike state that worried Horton.

“I’m sorry this had to happen,” he told her earnestly. “I really am.



They Arrived in Calcutta

I knew you loved the Phantom."

Diana was not eager to talk about it. She said huskily, "I—I guess I'm the little girl who got left in the rush."

Horton led her to a restaurant. He ordered coffee and urged her to drink it. She did not seem to hear him nor see the cup.

"Don't judge him too quickly, Diana," Horton said gently. "Perhaps he still loves you."

Diana smiled weakly. "You're



He Spoke of the Phantom

sweet to say that, Mel." And then she bowed her head and tears came to her eyes. "It wasn't bad enough to find him one of the Sky Band, but that—that horrible woman! Why did he have to be so cruel?"

Horton suffered with her and for her. "What are you going to do now?" he asked.

"Go back to America, I guess."

"Stay here in Calcutta," Horton begged. But Diana only shook



"I Will Return to America."

her head. "I don't know," was all she would say. "I'm all mixed up."

Diana was not the only one who was confused over the Phantom's alliance with the Sky Band. In the Baroness's quarters on the Isle of Herons, Sala watched her leader with smouldering eyes. The Baroness was caressing the pearls.

"Beautiful!" she said, entranced. "Worth a queen's ransom. It was worth the trouble to get them!"



She Watched With Smoldering Eyes

Sala said, in a level voice, "Shall I arrange to have them taken to the mainland and disposed of in the usual way?"

The Baroness smiled but her eyes narrowed. "No. We shall not sell these pearls. I shall keep them myself."

"But, Baroness," Sala protested, "that is against the Band rules. Everything taken in raids is sold and divided equally."

The blond leader leaped to her



The Baroness Kept the Poach

feet. "Don't use that tone of voice to me!" she cried furiously. "I make the Sky Band rules. I break them!"

For a moment the room was silent. The two women stood tensely looking at each other. Then the Baroness said softly, "What's more, Sala, there's a certain friend of mine whom I'd advise you to avoid seeing. Do I make myself clear?"

Sala's lips curled, but she said



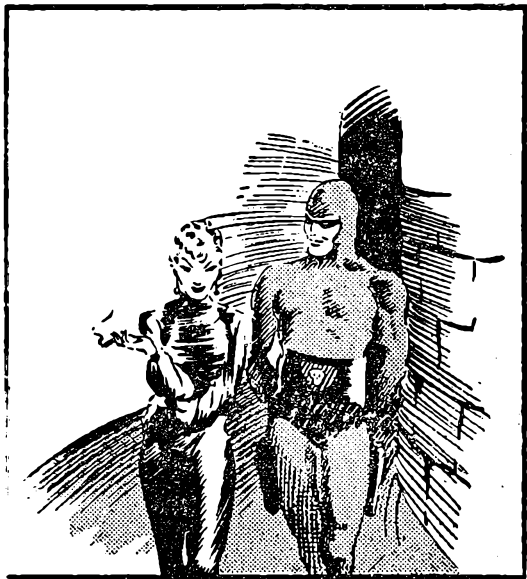
"I Make the Sky Band Rule!"

evenly, "Yes, you do, Baroness. You make yourself quite clear."

The Baroness dismissed her and went to liberate the Phantom. Together, they walked along the prison passage. The Baroness gave a sigh of pleasure.

"Ah, my friend, it is so good to talk to one who understands me," she said. "I am really a shy, trusting girl at heart. I love poetry and flowers and little birds."

The Phantom said, "How



"I Am a Shy, Trusting Girl."

sweet," and they entered another passage. Here was the whipping block. A girl hung there now, tied by the wrists. Another girl stood by holding a whip. She said to the Baroness, "Mirana is ready for punishment."

"Oh, yes." The Baroness took the whip. "I'd almost forgotten. I want to make an example of her."

The whip swung and cut into the girl's back seven times.

"And the next one," the Bar-



Mirana Had Disobeyed

oness panted, "caught smoking in the hangar will get a double dose." She saw that Mirana had fainted. "No backbone!" she sneered. She tossed the whip aside and resumed her walk with the Phantom.

"As I was saying," she smiled "I have the soul of a little child but no one appreciates me. They all take advantage of me."

"So I see," said the Phantom.

In Calcutta, Captain Horton had just met Mr. Powell, mar-



Captain Horton Met Mr. Powell

ager of the India Airways. They greeted each other with enthusiasm.

Colonel Devon, who had brought the two men together, had told Mr. Powell that Horton had a plan to break up the Sky Band.

"If you can do that," Powell said, "we'll be indebted to you."

Horton said, "Here's the idea. Next week, newspapers will run the story that the *Calcutta Clipper*



Horton Told of His Plan

is carrying the Fenmore Ruby to Rangoon and also a record insurance premium to protect it."

Powell cried out, "What!"

Horton smiled. "The *Clipper* won't really carry the gem. That's the newspaper story. Instead, the *Clipper* will pick up a squad of soldiers, secretly, out in the harbor. Also, a machine gun. Mark my word! The Sky Band will attack the *Clipper*!"

Powell was listening intent-



"The Sky Band Will Attack!"

Horton continued, "Their spies won't miss that news story, and when the band attacks, they'll find trouble, instead of a helpless crew and passenger."

"Captain," Powell said, "it's a marvelous idea. We have to act before the Sky Band destroys us completely."

Horton rose and leaned against the desk. "All we need," he said tensely, "are a few Sky Band prisoners. Once we have them, we'll



They Needed a Few Prisoners

force them to tell us where their base is!"

At the time Captain Horton had explained his plans to Powell another conversation was taking place at the Sky Band base. Sala stood before the cell where the Phantom spent most of his time.

"You can see how far the Baroness will trust you!" Sala was saying hotly. "Except when you are tied to her apron strings, she keeps you locked up in here like a blue



"She Keeps You Locked Up!"

ribbon pony!"

Run along, Sala," the Phantom told her. "I'm busy."

But Sala was not to be put off that easily. "She can't order me around!" Sala went on. "Tell me who I can see and who I can't. I'm the Wing of the Sky Band, second in command. Just let her dare try anything with me!"

The Baroness in her chamber above the Phantom's cell heard every word Sala said through a



The Baroness Heard Every Word

bamboo speaking tube.

“Sol” Her mouth twisted into a thin line. “That’s the way it is dear Sala. We shall see!”

She sent for the dark-haired girl and Sala came in fearlessly. The Baroness said, “I told you to stay away from our friend, yet five minutes later, I hear you talking to him—and challenging me!”

Sala shrugged. “I’ve as much right to see him as you have. I’m Wing of the Sky Band, second in



She Questioned Sala

command!"

"You refuse to obey my orders?" The Baroness raised herself from her leaning position on her couch and sat upright. "You know what that means, Sala?"

"In this case, it means—nothing! This is personal."

The Baroness blew smoke through her set mouth. "Is it?" she said.

"Yes." Sala came nearer, standing close to the couch. "If the



"Why Don't You Kill Him?"

Phantom is dangerous to the Sky Band, why don't you kill him?" she demanded and laughed shortly. "You know you never will! I obey you only where the Band is concerned and in nothing else!"

Sala turned and marched swiftly from the room. The Baroness was left with her thoughts.

"Sala is too popular with the Band to be removed clumsily," she reflected. "This needs time and careful thought!"

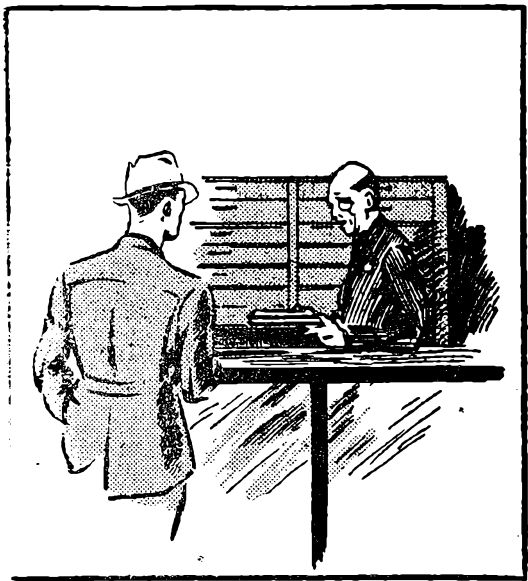


This Needed Careful Thought

CHAPTER IV
TOO SMART

Mr. Dunlop, the jeweler, looked over the counter at the young man who had come into his place of business. He was a caller, he knew, not a customer.

The man said, "I'm from the paper, Mr. Dunlop. I've heard you're sending the Fenmore Ruby to Rangoon on the *Calcutta Clip*."



Mr. Dunlop Had a Caller

per."

"Oh, dear," the jeweler sighed. "It's just impossible to keep anything from you reporters."

The newspaper man came up to the showcase. "That's right through Sky Band territory," he pointed out.

"I know," Mr. Dunlop sighed again, "but the gem must get there. We're paying a terrific premium for insurance on it."

"You won't mind if we run the



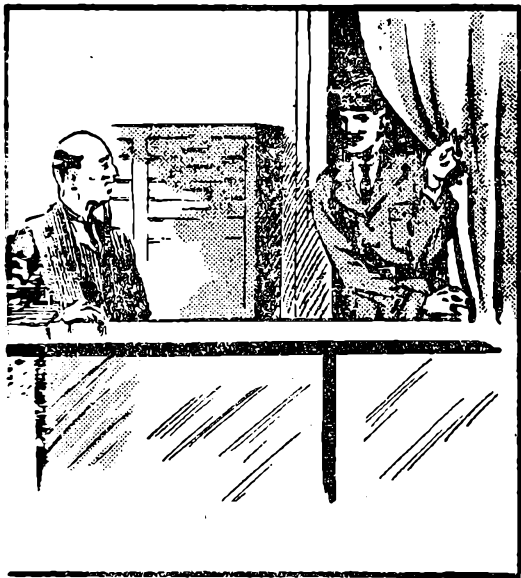
He Would Run the Story

story, will you?" The reporter moved toward the door.

Mr. Dunlop said, "Try and stop you from using it, is what you mean! There's no way of getting around you fellows."

The young man grinned and hurried on his way. A smile hovered about the jeweler's mouth as he turned to a curtain at his back. It parted, and Captain Horton appeared.

"That was perfect, Mr. Dun-



"That Was Perfect," Horton Said

lop," Horton applauded. "The paper will run the story and the news will be at Sky Band Headquarters before the printing ink is dry on the sheet. I'll wager my boots on that!"

Some of Captain Horton's prediction came true. The Baroness learned of the newspaper story for one of the band came swiftly with the report.

"We have received confirmation from Calcutta in reference to



The Baroness Heard the Report

the Fenmore Ruby," she said, and the Baroness put out her hand. She took the paper and swiftly read what was written there.

"Hmmmm," she murmured "all nicely printed in a newspaper for the world to see! Fenmore Ruby bound for Rangoon on the *Calcutta Clipper*. Owners fear Sky Band." Her lips spread in a jeering smile, as she finished reading. "Pay high insurance premium." She threw the paper



"Owners Fear Sky Band," She Read

the floor.

"Do they think I am a child?" she raged. "If they were really transporting the ruby, would they tell everyone about it? Such an obvious, clumsy trap is an insult to my intelligence!"

But her mood changed swiftly. Another angle appeared. The Baroness murmured softly, "Perhaps this trap will have its use—to me! I've been looking for a way to get rid of Sala without antagoniz-



She Thought of a Plan

ing the rest of the Band. And *this* is it!"

The Baroness went ahead with her plan, even as Captain Horton saw the completion of his own. He met Mr. Powell at the airport and told him, "We're all set. By this time news that the *Clipper* is carrying the ruby will have reached the Sky Band."

Mr. Powell was nervous.

"Do you think they'll be fooled?" he questioned.



Horton Met Powell at the Airport

“Why not?” Horton asked. “Papers often carry stories like that. Besides, the ruby is worth a fortune. I’m counting on their greed to make them take a chance.”

“Let’s hope they do,” Powell said earnestly. “Good luck.”

The *Clipper* took off, flying to the bay where the launch was waiting. There the plane lowered and picked up the squad of armed soldiers and once again, it was on



The Soldiers Were Picked Up

its way.

At the Sky Band base on the Isle of Herons, another plane had been made ready. The crew stood in readiness, with Sala at the head. They were listening to the parting words of the Baroness.

"You have your orders. The *Clipper* carries the Fenmore Ruby. Attack near Bassein, as usual."

She paused for an instant, her eyes resting on Sala, and added



"Attack as Usual," She Said

“We’re only using one plane. Sala is in command.”

A moment of quiet followed this announcement. Sala said sharply, “*One* plane, Baroness?”

The golden-haired leader nodded. “One plane,” she said.

Sala’s hands went to her slim hips. She looked her leader squarely in the eye.

“We always use two!” she reminded the Baroness. “Why this change now?”



"One Plane?" Sala Asked

The Baroness smiled thinly.

“You’re not afraid, are you?” she asked. “If you are, you can remain here and I’ll put someone else in charge.”

“No, I’m not afraid!” Salaburst forth. “You needed two planes to get the pearls, didn’t you? Well, I’ll show *him* I can get the ruby with only one!”

The Baroness laughed.

“I’m certain *he’ll* be impressed.” She sobered, moved her head



Sala Was Not Afraid

in the direction of the waiting plane. "All right, take off!"

Sala gave her one last look of open hatred but held her tongue. Soon the Sky Band plane went roaring off on its mission of piracy.

The Baroness watched till the plane was out of sight, then, shrugging her shoulders, she turned and walked in the direction of the prison entrance. A few moments later, the Phantom had the news



He Had the Newspaper Report

paper report.

"They were fools enough to print that," the Baroness told him. "Practically throwing the ruby in our laps."

"I see," the masked man said slowly. "It looks rather obvious to me, like one of Horton's ideas."

The Baroness seemed not to have heard this. "Sala has just gone up the ramp," she said. "She's in charge."

"Oh," the Phantom drew in



"It Seems Obvious to Me."

his breath sharply, "I see." The eyes behind the mask glistened. "Sometimes, Baroness, the cleverest of us get a bit too smart. Did it ever occur to you that if Sala or anyone else is captured, they may be forced to talk? To reveal the location of this place?"

The Baroness dismissed the idea with a wave of her hand.

"The members of the Skat Band are under oath not to reveal anything," she said surely. "And



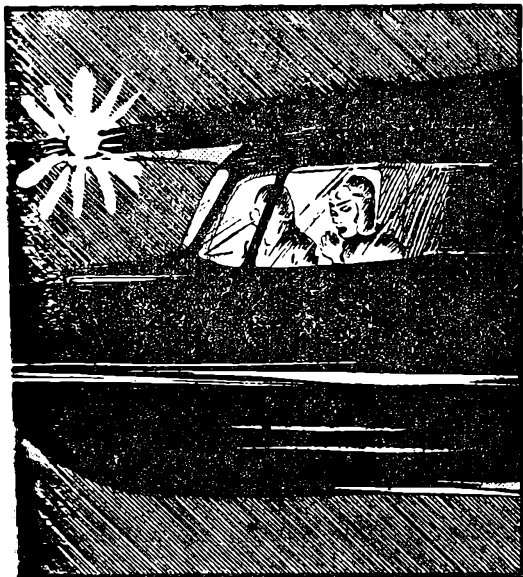
The Baroness Was Sure of Her Band

no one would ever use third degree methods on a woman."

"I see," the Phantom said. "You attack like a man, and then hide behind your skirts. Not quite logical, is it?"

The only answer the Baroness gave him was a shrug of her shoulders. She appeared to be very much satisfied with herself and her hold over the Sky Band.

Now, with Sala in command the pirate plane was nearing



The Sky Band Gave Warning

Bassein. The *Clipper* was sighted and Sala ordered the warning to be given.

"*Calcutta Clipper*. Lower at once or we'll drop you!"

"That was the usual warning, sir," the radio operator told Horton. "You can see the purple lights. Only one plane, as far as I can see. Usually, they're two."

"Do as they say," Horton said. "Lower to the water." He turned to face the armed soldiers.



The Clipper Had the Message

“Get set, boys,” he told them. “This is it. Keep low until the plane pulls up alongside us. Hold fire until I give command.” His smile was grim. “This’ll be a little surprise for the Sky Band. Usually, they descend on an unarmed, helpless plane. This time, they’re flying into a hornets nest!”



A Surprise Awaited the Sky Band

CHAPTER V
IN THE TRAP

Horton had formed a plan; the Baroness had known of that plan and aided it, and now Sala was co-operating fully and without suspicion.

Horton held his men back while they watched the Sky Band plane lowering to the water.

“They’re climbing out now.”



Horton Held His Men Back

Horton observed tensely. "Wait for my orders. I don't want to fire unless we have to. If we do, shoot *low*. We're taking these pirates alive!"

Silence held in the *Calcutta Clipper*. Presently, Horton said "I'll go first." He went to the door, opened it and stood there calling, "Throw down your guns! We have you covered!"

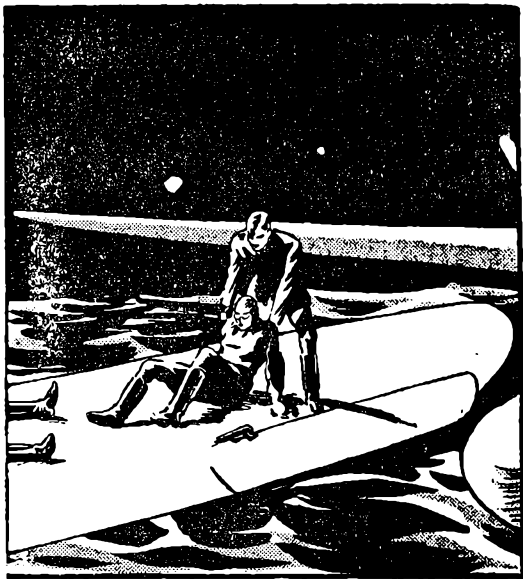
"You don't say!" Sala called back and fired point-blank.



Sala Had Fired Point-Blank

Captain Horton staggered backward as the bullet grazed the side of his head. He cried out, "Why, you—," and then gave the order, "Fire!"

The soldiers on the *Clipper* were easily victorious in the shooting that followed. The Sky Band had not expected, nor been prepared for armed resistance. The pirates were quickly overcome. One of the band, who moaned, "Oh, my leg!" Captain Horton



The Pirates Were Overcome

helped aboard the *Clipper*. The others were also carried to the passenger plane.

"The rats!" Horton gritted. "They were lucky we kept our guns low." The captive he was helping seemed scarcely more than a boy. This lad, Horton reflected, was the one who had fired at him. But when the helmet was removed, Horton cried out in amazement, recognizing the face at once.



Horton Cried in Amazement, "Sala!"

“Sala!” he exclaimed.

He knew now why his prisoner had been such a light weight in his arms, why the voice had seemed so young.

Sala was also surprised.

“So, it’s you again, Horton!” She sat straighter, trying to ignore the pain in her leg. “Guess you’ll get a medal for this!”

Even as Horton had taken a girl for his prisoner, the other soldiers were making a like discovery. One



"They're All Dames!"

said, "They're all dames! Is this Sky Band made up exclusively of skirts?"

Horton had pulled out his handkerchief and was tying it around his head.

"Another inch and you'd really have put a dent in me," he said. "I'm lucky it was you instead of a man."

"I'll do better next time," Sale retorted. "And tell your soldier boys we're ladies, not skirts."



"I'll Do Better Next Time."

Horton knew the girl was in pain. The thing now was to get her to Calcutta and a hospital as soon as possible.

It was the following afternoon when Horton called on her at the hospital. She appeared to be in high spirits.

"Your boy scouts didn't do much better than I did," she told him tartly. "I was only scratched."

"Yes," said Horton, "by my orders." He seated himself on the



She Was Not Seriously Hurt

chair at her bedside. "Now, we're going to play a little questions and answers game. I ask, you answer."

Sala smiled.

Horton put his first question. "Is the Sky Band made up entirely of women?"

She answered that. "Yes, Captain. It's all quite chummy. Like a little sewing circle."

Horton said seriously, "You'll be given your freedom if you lead us to your Sky Band base."



Horton Began to Question Sala

The girl gave him a sidewise glance. "And if I don't lead you to our base?" she asked.

Horton rose to his feet.

"Then you'll take what's coming to you before a military tribunal," he said sternly, "on charges of piracy and murder."

"Run along, Captain," Sala waved him away. "I'm tired of playing games. Unlike other sewing circles, we never gossip about each other."



She Refused to Answer Him..

But Horton did not leave at once. "Better think this over, Sala," he advised. "Remember, piracy—and murder."

He bowed slightly, turned and left the room, and for a time, the smile lingered about Sala's pretty mouth. But as the hours passed, her face sobered.

"What a simple fool I was!" she admitted to herself, bitterly. "The way I fell for this trap—and the Baroness knew it was a trap. I'c



"What a Fool I Was!"

have seen it myself, if I hadn't been so anxious to impress *him!*"

Sala's thoughts dwelt upon the masked man, the Phantom.

"I thought the Sky Band was too strong for anyone," she thought wretchedly, "yet he's destroying it without lifting a hand."

Sala twisted on the bed. "She got me neatly out of the way. Well. Sala, maybe you're not good enough for him, but neither is



"She Got Me Out of the Way."

she!"

The time passed slowly, but each moment deepened Sala's resolution. She knew what the nurse was going to say when she stepped up to the bed.

"It's time for you to face the Military Board. Your wheel chair is being brought in."

"I'm ready," Sala told her instantly. "And I don't need a wheel chair. I can walk!" She sat upright. "Bring my clothes. My et-



Sala Must Face the Military Board

quette book tells me a nightgown is improper for Court attire!"

If she were weakened by the wound, Sala did not show it. She came to the massive table where the sober-faced men were seated assisted only by a cane.

Horton spoke first.

"You are prepared to lead us to the Sky Band base?"

Sala said, perversely, "This is something of a personal affair."

Horton's face was grim. "You



She Said It Was a Personal Affair

must answer our questions. What do you mean by saying this is a personal affair?"

"Just that," the girl answered. "I'll settle my own grudges, if and when I can."

"We're not interested in your personal grudges," Horton told her. "I warn you, if you don't co-operate with us now, and lead us to the Sky Band base—,"

He paused for an instant, and Sala said quietly, "Then what?"



"We Dislike Executing Women."

“Then, you’ll never have the chance! Because, if you’re lucky, you’ll *only* have to spend the rest of your life in prison. We dislike executing women, but there’s always a first time!”

The room was very quiet for a long minute. Then Sala broke the silence with a mirthless laugh.

“There’s something in that,” she said. “All right! Load your bombers!” She rose somewhat shakily and stood leaning against



"All Right, Load Your Bombers!"

the cane she carried. "I'll take you to our base! It'll be a pleasure!"

The preparations went forward swiftly, and the time came when Sala was leading the military air squadron to the Isle of Herons, the base of the Sky Band.

"There it is," Sala pointed. "That little speck ahead."

"I see it," Horton said.

"I warn you," Sala spoke urgently, "don't waste time. Our—"

She broke off, remembering



She Pointed Out the Base

that she had severed allegiance to the Sky Band, and changed her speech. "*Their* detectors probably have already caught our propeller sound."

"Don't worry," Captain Horton assured her. "We won't waste any time!"

A warning for unconditional surrender was radioed, but strangely, there was no answer.

"There's nothing left to do," Horton said. "We go into bomb-

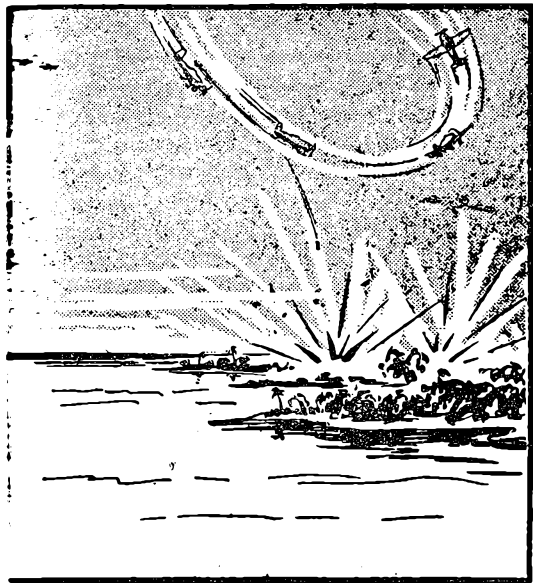


They Got No Answer to Their Warning

ing formation at once!’’

Sala had done her part and now she sat back, white-faced. She was thinking of the Phantom locked in his cell, helpless. But she had made her choice. It was too late now to turn back.

One terrific detonation followed another, as the heavy aerial bombs fell on the Isle of Herons, the base of the Sky Band.



Bombs Fell on the Sky Band Base

CHAPTER VI
CAGED AGAIN

The work of devastation accomplished, Captain Horton landed his squadron. On searching the Sky Band base an astonishing discovery was made.

The Isle of Herons was deserted.

"Empty as an old beer bottle!" Captain Horton growled as he



The Base Was Deserted.

made his way through the wreckage.

The soldier who accompanied him said, "By the looks of it, sir, I'd say they got away in a hurry, and not long ago."

To this Captain Horton agreed. A stove that was still warm had been found. But the whole affair was puzzling, very puzzling.

One of the men came to Horton. "Did you see the ramp leading underground, sir?" he asked.



They Had Got Away in a Hurry

“Complete hangar at the bottom. Pretty smooth.”

They were near the spot now. “I saw it,” Horton said, “very interesting. And there’s someone there now!” They went together through the ruins of the ramp. Horton soon came face to face with the intruder. It was Sala.

“What are you doing down here?” he asked her. “I told you to remain in the plane.”

“I was looking for a certain



Sala Searched the Ruins

party, Captain," Sala told him. "If the bombs hadn't finished her, I was going to!" and there could be little doubt that Sala meant and would do just as she had said.

Horton told his man, "Take her away and guard her. She's as vicious as a wildcat." He pushed back his cap and moped his forehead. "Gives me the shivers to look at her," he added.

The soldier answered fervently, "Me, too, sir. Mind if I get one



"Guard Her," Horton Said

of the other boys to stand guard with me?"

Meanwhile, many flying hours away, the Phantom was seated at the side of the Baroness. She had been watching with feverish interest the light bulb on the machine before her. At length, it went out.

"Out, at last," the Phantom said, "Will you tell me what that meant, Baroness?"

"It means that the sending apparatus at our base had just been



She Knew of the Destruction

destroyed, probably by bombs," she replied.

She spoke quietly enough. All along, since their leaving for this new base, the Baroness had held herself with a rigid calm. But the Phantom guessed that she was in a seething anger.

"You think of everything," he observed. "What made you guess that Sala would turn informer?"

"A little bird told me." She smiled wryly. "I suppose you



"A Little Bird Told Me."

know all this is your fault. My first serious set-back has been caused by you!"

The Phantom frowned.

"I don't follow you," he said. "You mean that you really knew about the trap?"

"Yes, I knew about the trap."

"And knowing that, you sent Sala into it?" The eyes behind the mask were narrowed. "And you did all this because—?"

"Because it was my wish," the

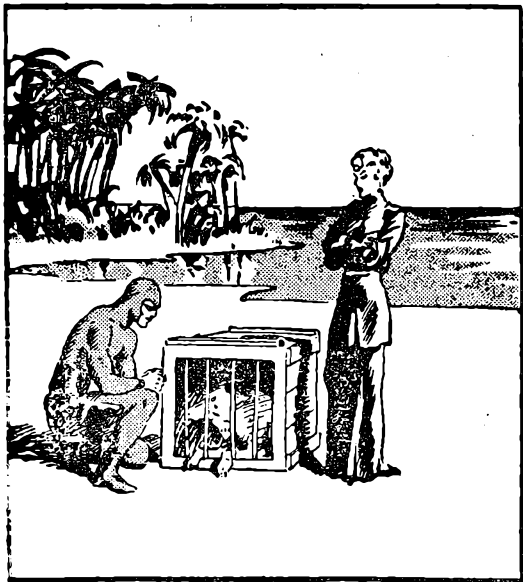


"Yes, I Knew About the Trap."

Baroness said tartly. "Let us not be too inquisitive, my friend. And let us stop talking about Sala. The topic bores me."

Perhaps to divert the Phantom's attention, the Baroness took him to a cage on the shore of the new island base. Here the masked man met one of his dearest friends, his dog, whom he called Devil.

"Devil, old boy!" he exclaimed, kneeling beside the cage



His Dog, Devil, Was Caged

“Baroness, can’t you let him out for a little run?”

“No,” she said. “He remains caged like his master, until I can learn to trust him fully.”

The tone of her voice suggested that the time when she could trust the Phantom might be far in the future, and the masked man made no protest. He kept his silence. The Baroness sighed.

“Come, I’ll show you around.”

They went together toward the



She Showed Him the Ramp

entrance to the ramp and the Phantom remarked, "This is just like the one on the Isle of Herons."

The Baroness was proud of her achievement. "Yes," she said. "This base is a duplicate of the other. We've been working on it for a year or so, just in case we ever needed it."

Side by side, they went down the long flight of steps.

"And just in case Sala should



This Was a Duplicate Base

decide to reveal the old one," the Baroness went on, "we've established a new radio contact in Calcutta." She looked at him for approval, but his face was set.

"Aren't you forgetting," he said, "that Sala will know about this new base as well?"

"I'm forgetting nothing!" she snapped. "We will remain here long enough to plan the biggest feat of our career! Then we move!"



She Received the Calcutta Report

The Phantom soon knew what she meant. He was with her when she received the radio report from Calcutta: "*Olympia* leaving Bagdad for Karachi."

"We'll just have to wait," the Baroness shrugged. "It's too soon. When it leaves Calcutta—!"

"The *Olympia*!" the Phantom cut in. "The world's largest dirigible. You plan to attack it!"

"Yes. I told you this would be my biggest job." She gloated over



She Planned Her Biggest Job

the thought. "It's on its way around the world loaded to the gills with rich and distinguished passengers! That means not one ransom, but many! Ah! And what an adventure it will be!"

The Phantom's wrists were still manacled rigidly together. When he cried, "Kidnaping!" the iron shuddered as though it might give. "That's new for you!"

The Baroness motioned with her hand for him to relax. "Not a

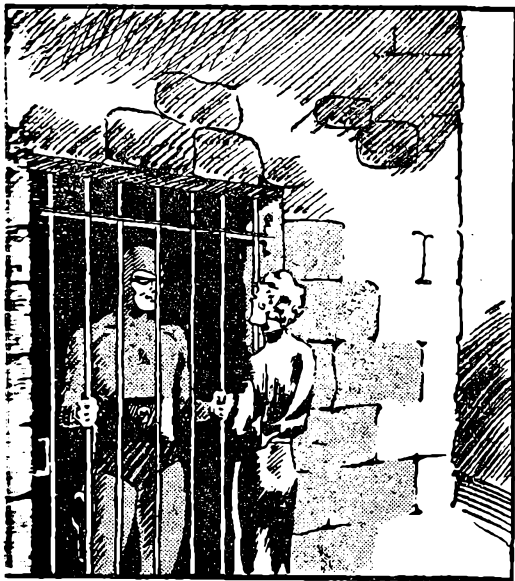


"This Would Be Kidnapping!"

new angle," she said. "Just another version of the same thing. It will be the most daring feat of piracy in all history."

The Phantom was leaning back in his chair, but his voice cut in like a whiplash. "Baroness, don't count your chickens before you catch them!"

It was, perhaps, this outburst which caused the Phantom to be placed again in a prison cell. Later, the Baroness paid a visit.



Back in a Cell Again

"I'm back in familiar surroundings," the masked man remarked dryly. "Baroness, are you serious about attacking the *Olympia*?"

"Am I ever anything but serious?" she retorted. "A clumsy gasbag like that will be an easy mark." She was smiling, but her eyes glistened with greed.

"Someday," the Phantom said darkly, "you're going to get caught. What then?"

"Hmm," the Baroness meditat-



Someday She Would Get Caught

ed, "it's a chance we all take. But I'm ready. I'll never be paraded in court before gaping yokels!"

"You sound very sure of yourself," the Phantom observed.

"I am sure." The Baroness slipped her fingers to a concealed pocket near her waist and drew out a small, dark object.

"You see this locket? It contains a small but sufficient amount of very potent poison. When my time comes, it'll be my last joke!" She



The Locket Contained Poison

laughed. "You see, I'll beat the hangman as I've always beaten all other men!"

She left him then, and the Phantom sighed heavily watching her retreating figure. For a brief time he paced the small area of his cell and then seated himself on the bench alongside the wall. Before long, he had a guest. A mouse with whom he had made friends jumped upon the bench beside him.

"Well, pal," the Phantom ad-



A Mouse Joined Him

dressed his visitor, "it's a pleasure to be able to chat to a man again. At least, I trust you are a man. Otherwise, why would you be in a cell in this land of women?"

The mouse squeaked companionably, but fled to the floor when the Baroness returned.

"Who are you talking to?" she demanded, "I heard you! Don't deny it!"

"There's nothing to deny." The Phantom pointed to the



"Who Were You Talking To?"

floor. "I was chatting to that little mouse. He's been coming around every morning for crumbs."

"A mouse!" the Baroness cried in horror. She did not try to see the little animal, but leaped away from the bars. "I'll have rat poison scattered around your cell."

"Oh, no, you don't!" the Phantom retorted. "That little mouse and I have become pals. If he goes, I go."

After the Baroness had left, the



"A Mouse!" The Baroness Cried

Phantom thought wryly, "Where would I go? And how?"

He was back on the bench, and the mouse reappeared.

"If I could slip through the bars like you do," the Phantom told him. The mouse listened attentively without one squeak. The Phantom ground his teeth. "I can't delay any longer! The *Olympia* is the last straw. I've got to act in a hurry—now!" But again, he added hopelessly, "*How?*"



The Mouse Listened Attentively

CHAPTER VII

A LITTLE MOUSE

The Phantom knew from the Baroness's own lips that the Sky Band planned to attack the *Olympia*, the world's largest dirigible. and here he sat, helpless in a cell talking to a mouse! But it was the mouse that gave him his idea.

He asked to see the Baroness and she came at his request. A



He Had Asked to See Her.

worried frown furrowed her forehead.

“You wished to see me?” she asked. “An urgent matter?”

“Yes, Baroness, I want to ask a favor. I hope it’s not too much. It’s something that I really love.”

The Baroness’s eyes glowed. “What is it you want?” She came near the bars. “Whisper to me.”

“All right, I’ll whisper it.” His voice softened. “I’d like a nice piece of cheese.”



"I'd Like a Piece of Cheese."

“Cheese!” she cried, first in astonishment, and then angrily, “Cheese!” She glared at him. “Very well. I’ll send you some cheese!”

She flounced away and the Phantom feared his request would not be granted. But it was. The sentry brought him a generous golden slice of cheese and, using a bit of it, the Phantom trapped the mouse.

“You like it, too, eh?” he smiled



He Trapped the Mouse

as he gently but firmly held the small creature. "I won't keep you long, pal. I just want to borrow you for a few minutes."

Holding the mouse behind his back, the Phantom called to the sentry in the passage.

"What do you want?" she asked, coming to his cell.

"I just wanted to show you a friend of mine," the Phantom said, and held out the mouse.

"E-yee! a mouse!" the girl cried



He Held Out the Mouse

and as she jerked backward she dropped her gun. Before she could move too far away, the Phantom's hands shot through the bars. He gripped her hand and covered her mouth.

"I'll have to trouble you for the key to my cell," he told her. "And stop wriggling or I'll drop the mouse in your hair!"

In less than ten minutes, the sentry was out of the Phantom's way. Using his own handkerchief,

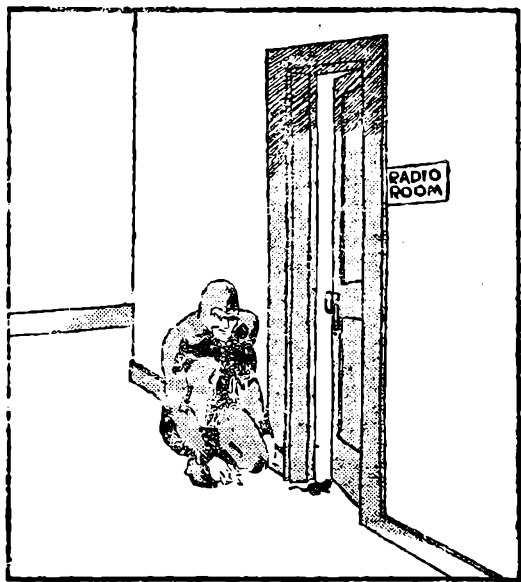


The Sentry Was Out of the Way.

and hers, and a scarf the Baroness had left one morning, the Phantom gagged the girl and bound her hand and foot.

“Funny,” he remarked, “how a hardboiled, two-gun gal like you is afraid of a little mouse. You sit quietly there or I’ll sick him on you.”

Holding her gun in one hand and the mouse by the tail in the other, the Phantom smiled with satisfaction as he went out into



The Radio Room Was Next

the passage. The radio room was his next stop according to the plan he had swiftly formed. Luck favored him for he met with no opposition.

“You have to use peculiar weapons with women,” he observed, “but then, they’re peculiar people.”

The door of the radio room was open a little now, and the mouse was ready to enter.

“Do your stuff, Mr. Mouse,”



The Mouse Went to Work

the Phantom whispered. "Just once more." The mouse went to work. He ran straight for the chair where the radio operator sat, and he squeaked as he ran.

The Phantom had slipped in and hidden behind the open door. He heard the girl shriek, "A mouse! A mouse!" Then wild with terror she raced from the room.

The Phantom lost no time in bolting the door after her and put-



He Was Locked in the Radio Room

ting on the earphones. Securely locked in the radio room, the Phantom went to work with a will.

“Calcutta . . .” he called. “X9ZT3 . . . Calcutta X9ZT3.” Again and again until he had his response.

“Never mind who I am,” he said in answer to the sharp questions which came presently, “or where I am or how I knew your call number. Take down a message and see that it is sent to Cap-



"A Message for Captain Horton."

tain Melville Horton."

Calcutta was ready and the Phantom went on, "I'm going to talk fast and I haven't time to repeat a word. Here goes. Get it!"

While he worked against time, delivering the message to Calcutta, there was a council outside the door of the radio room. The Baroness heard of the Phantom's activity first from the sentry and then from the radio operator.

"And then he tied me up," the



A Council Was Held

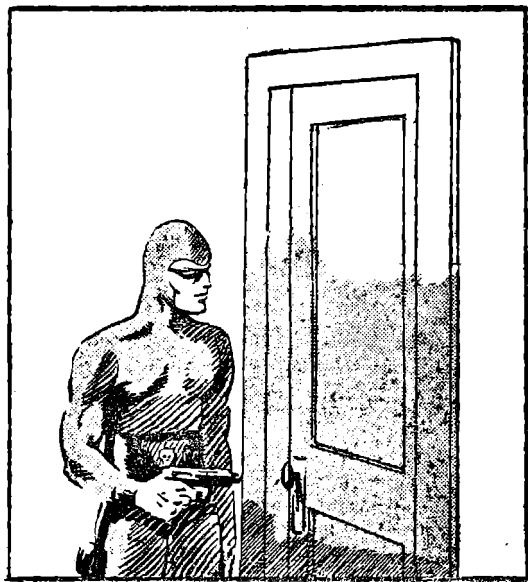
sentry was saying. The operator reported that all she had seen was the mouse. "I ran out," she said, and the Baroness gave each of them a scathing look.

"You fools!" she said hotly.

"But, that mouse—!" the sentry shuddered.

"Fools!" the Baroness cried again. "Do you realize he's inside there—and that door is locked!"

All of them knew this only too well. The Baroness stepped to the



The Phantom Refused to Obey.

door and called out, "Come out, or we'll dynamite the door!"

The Phantom refused to obey.

"Dynamite the door," he said grimly, "and wreck your underground hangar? Fat chance, Baroness. I've had enough of that cell and I've got a gun. I dare you to come in and get me!"

Fortune favored the Phantom. He had the upper hand and he knew it, so did the Baroness and her followers.



How Could They Get Him Out?

“What can we do?” the sentry said helplessly. “He’s right. We daren’t use dynamite down here.”

The radio operator suggested, “We could starve him out.”

The Baroness looked at her.

“And leave him in the radio room?” she snapped. “No!”

The two girls stood in silence while the Baroness considered a way to make the Phantom obey. Presently she said, “I know. Bring me his animal!”



"If You Don't Come Out—!"

The dog was brought in.

"I've got Devil here," the Baroness called. "If you don't come out in thirty seconds, I'll blow off his head!"

For a moment it was quiet in the radio room and then the Phantom asked, "How do I know you've got Devil out there?"

He came close to the door, placing his ear against the panel.

"Devil," he called. "Devil, can you hear me? Let me hear you."



He Heard the Dog Bark

He heard the dog bark, a wildly pleading bark that begged his master to open the door that separated them.

“He just spoke for himself,” the Baroness said. “You’ve got ten seconds left to decide.”

It did not take the Phantom that long. His mind was made up in the instant. He turned the key in the lock, opened the door and stepped into the passage.

“Well,” he said, “this is your



"This Is Your Round, Baroness."

round, Baroness."

"Put handcuffs on him," the Sky Band leader ordered grittingly. Then to the Phantom she said, "Throw down your pistol!" The dog was barking wildly as the Phantom readily obeyed. He knelt on the floor and the dog leaped into his arms.

"Haven't seen you in a dog's age, fella," the Phantom said. "You didn't think I was going to let her shoot you, did you?"



He Had Saved the Dog

CHAPTER VIII
ONE BRAVE MAN

The Phantom was handcuffed again, and brought to face the Baroness. She eyed him reproachfully.

"And I had almost come to trust you," she sighed.

"Never trust a man whom you keep in handcuffs," the Phantom retorted. "Such men are very un-



He Was Handcuffed Again

reliable.”

The Baroness's eyes narrowed dangerously. “What did you do in the radio room?” she asked bluntly. “Whom did you call?”

“I got nothing but wrong numbers. So I just twiddled my thumbs.”

She said sharply, “I'll hear from our Calcutta operative any moment now. If her message comes through all right, I'll know you're not lying. If it doesn't—I'll kill



The Calcutta Office Was Calling.

you!"

"Our Calcutta office is calling Baroness," one of the Sky Band came to report.

"Good!" the Baroness said.
"Now I'll get the truth!"

The Baroness led the way, and escorted by an armed guard, the Phantom followed her. If he were worried, he did not show it. She took the radio operator's vacated place and was saying presently:
"Yes, this is the Baroness. Did you



Now She Would Know the Truth

catch any message originating here about a half-hour ago?"

The Phantom could not know the answer. "No, Baroness."

The Baroness asked, "What of the *Olympia*?"

The reply came immediately, "*Olympia* leaving Calcutta at noon, via Bassein as expected."

Little did the Baroness dream that in the secret Calcutta office of the Sky Band, Captain Horton was directing the operator.



Captain Horton Directed Her

"And tell her no suspicions have been aroused."

"No one suspects our plans to attack the *Olympia*," the girl was forced to say. "Everything is going smoothly. Yes . . . I'll keep in touch with you."

It was done, and Captain Horton smiled with satisfaction.

"Take her away, and lock her up," he told one of his men. He drew a deep sigh as he replaced his gun. "By George, that was



They Could Thank the Phantom

close! We got here just in time!"

"We have the Phantom to thank for it," the soldier said, and led the captive operator away.

Shortly after, Captain Horton was seated at a table, making his report at Service headquarters.

"We reached their Calcutta office just in time," he said. "The home base of the Sky Band suspects nothing."

"Good!" one of the officers said. "What else was in this Phan-



Horton Made His Report

tom's message?"

"He says to permit the *Olympia* to leave her moorings at the regular time," Horton said, consulting the paper. "Then, after a half hour of flight, have her turn back to Calcutta." He looked up. "A precaution, I suppose, just in case there are any other Sky Band spies about."

The younger Service man asked, "Why don't we attack their base?"



He Read the Phantom's Message

"He said not to," Horton answered. "Their detectors will warn them. They'd be away before we could reach them." His mouth became a thin line. "Instead of a helpless dirigible, the Sky Band will meet my squadron!"

"Imagine!" said the other. "Attacking the *Olympia*! It would have been the biggest scandal the Orient has ever known!"

Horton nodded.

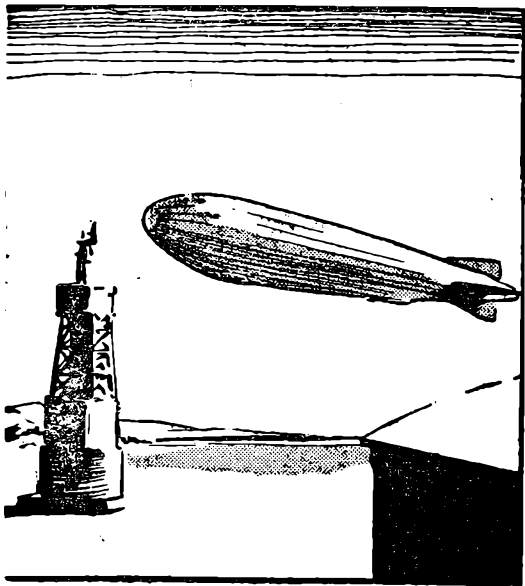


He Had Misjudged the Phantom

“And it would have happened,” he said, “except for one man! How I’ve misjudged him! He’s been playing a waiting game all along!”

According to the plan which the Phantom had outlined, everything was done. At the regular time, the *Olympia* left her moorings, and one hour after her departure, returned to Calcutta.

The passengers, never dreaming of the misery they had been spared, complained loudly and



The Olympia Returned to Calcutta

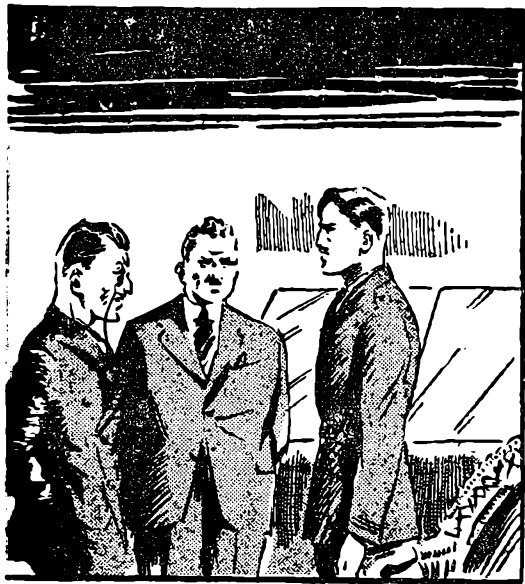
finally went to Captain Horton. They demanded to know the meaning of the delay.

"Gentlemen," Captain Horton said soberly, "you can thank your lucky stars you are here."

"What do you mean?" the wealthy Mr. Anton Benner wanted to know.

"I mean," Horton told him. "you've escaped kidnaping and possible death."

"Kidnaping!" Benner gasped.



"You've Escaped Kidnapping."

“Possible death!”

“That’s right,” Horton snapped. “And you owe it all to one brave man whom you’ve never seen. He’s worked all alone in the dark. And now,” Horton swallowed, “he’s probably given his life!”

The Phantom had not given his life, but he was suffering at the hands of the Baroness. The masked man, she believed, had not succeeded in tricking her. But he had tried, and so he was given the



He Had Tried to Trick Her

whip, cruelly and mercilessly.

“You’ll live long enough to see me capture the *Olympia!*” she panted, giving lash after lash. “Then I’ll have the joy of watching you die!”

The Phantom endured his punishment without a murmur. This infuriated the Baroness.

“Pretending not to feel the whip, eh?” she jeered. “Too proud to cringe, eh?”

“You’re not a woman,” the



"Too Proud to Cringe, Eh?"

Phantom spoke huskily but distinctly. "You're a vicious animal. Somehow, I feel sorry for you. You've made a mess of your life."

Once again, she struck him, and then cried, "Take him away!" Later, in her own room, the Baroness wept wildly. "He was right. but it's too late to turn back."

But when the Sky Band was ready for its biggest task, the Baroness was again composed.

"We leave now," she told the



"We Leave Now."

Phantom. "You shall see me triumph in spite of you!"

They were in the Baroness's plane. Devil was at the Phantom's side. The masked man smiled and showed no evidence of his recent whipping.

"Well," he said, "it was a good fight while it lasted."

"I trusted you," the Baroness hissed, "and you tried to trick me!"

A sidewise smile twisted the



"You Tried to Trick Me!"

mouth of the masked man.

He said, "You trusted me—in a cell or handcuffed."

"You'll never return here!" she went on, as though she had not heard what he had said. "The sharks of the Indian Ocean will have you in two hours!"

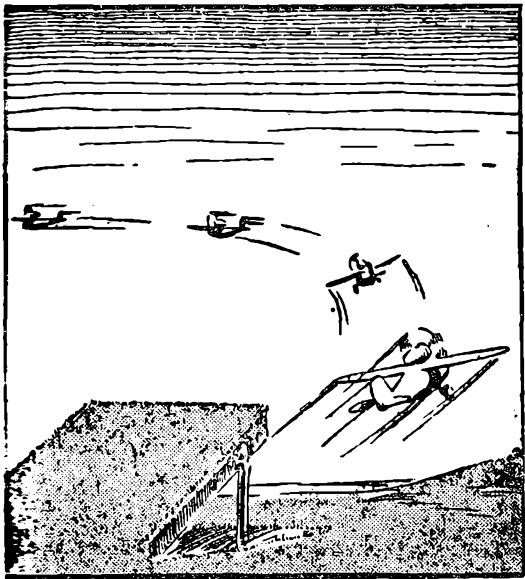
The Baroness left him, and the Phantom confided to Devil, "She doesn't know it, but she's not meeting the *Olympia*. Horton's fighting planes will be waiting for



"It's the End for Us, Fella."

her. It's the end for us, fella, either way." His arm across the dog's shoulder tightened and from the animal's throat came a gruff reply. It seemed as though Devil had understood every word and was ready and willing to follow his master.

As the Phantom spoke to his dog the entire Sky Band fleet zoomed up into the sky out of the underground ramp. The Baroness was headed for the greatest adventure!



They Headed for the Great Adventure

CHAPTER IX
HOW MANY BULLETS?

Skirting the Bengal coast of Burma, the Sky Band searched for the *Olympia*. "We're near Bassein," the pilot told the Baroness.

"Something's wrong!" the Baroness said in sudden fear. "We should have sighted the *Olympia* by now!" And then she saw them.

"Planes! Army planes!" she



"Planes—Army Planes!"

cried, pointing. "Look!"

The Phantom was sitting tense and still. He said, under his breath, "Now, Devil, *now!*"

Out of the sky roared five army planes headed toward the Sky Band fleet.

On the coastal plane, Horton was watching.

"They've sighted our squadron!" he cried. "We'll circle up behind them as the Phantom advised. *We're off!*"



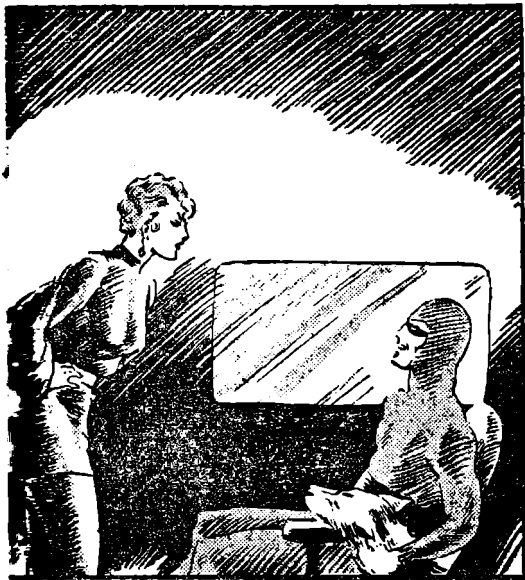
They Headed for the Sky Band

He watched the Sky Band pass, then signaled. The second army squadron veered into the air, coming up behind the pirate planes to complete the air-trap.

The Baroness was facing the Phantom.

“Army planes!” Her voice was wild. “You reached Calcutta! You warned them! You betrayed us!”

“Betray is hardly the right word in this case, Baroness,” the



"You Betrayed Us!"

masked man told her. "I'm not playing on your team."

She had turned from him and was calling, "Turn back! Our planes are faster than those old crates! We'll outdistance them and escape!"

And then, for the first time, the Baroness saw Captain Horton's squadron coming up behind the Sky Band planes.

"Trapped!" she cried. "Ten planes to our five. We'll have to



"Trapped!" She Cried

fight our way out!”

Greatly as he despised her, the Phantom felt an appreciation for the way the Baroness faced her predicament.

“We’ll give them a fight,” she snarled, “that they’ll never forget!”

Outnumbered two to one by the army planes, the Sky Band fought desperately. There were casualties on both sides.

“Those devils can fight,” was



The Sky Band Fought Desperately

the opinion of one of the army pilots. "All women! They're wildcats!"

There was the deafening roar of motors, the sputter of machine guns as the greatest air battle this part of the world had ever seen continued. But the greater mobility of the small army planes began to tell. Four of the five Sky Band planes were dropped.

"We're beaten!" the Baroness admitted. "All of you, bail out!"



She Told Them to Bail Out

We're over the coast."

She called to the girl, Telma, "Before you jump, put a parachute on the Phantom and cut his bonds."

Unwillingly, but obedient to the last, the Baroness's crew bailed out. But, first, Telma had done as she was told.

The Phantom stood now before the Baroness, the only two who were left on the last Sky Band plane.



Only Two Were Left

"I see you locked the controls, Baroness," the Phantom said grimly. He glanced at the gun in her hand. "Where do we go from here?"

The leader of a band that was no more was deathly pale. She spoke in a husky voice, "You've destroyed my band. Destroyed me!" She came a step nearer. "I'm going to kill you, do you hear? And let your body float down to the sharks!"



The Baroness Shot Him

The Baroness shot him then. and over and above the shot, she screamed, "The Sky Band dies! But so does the Phantom!"

After the sound had died, the Baroness stood waiting. The masked man had been hit, for she had shot him point-blank. But still he did not fall. Still he stood just as he had stood before, quietly looking at her.

"But—I shot you!" Her eyes widened with terror. "I saw the



"But—I Shot You!"

bullet strike you!"

Immovable as a statue he continued to stand, and to look at her.

"How many," the Baroness quavered, "how many bullets do you want?" And, for the second time, she pulled the trigger.

The Phantom remained exactly as he had been, moving not a muscle, saying not a word. The Baroness could no longer endure the sight of him, nor the silence.

"Say something!" she cried.



"How Many Bullets Do You Want?"

“Say something!”

But the Phantom said nothing.

The woman said, scarcely above a whisper, “The natives say you are immortal. That you cannot be killed! It can’t be true—but—but it is!”

She stepped back, away from the probing eyes behind the mask.

“Is this why you’ve never feared me? Why you have laughed at me? You are—immortal. You are—the ghost who walks!”



"You Are—Immortal?"

The cold nerve of the Baroness vanished completely. She screamed, again and again, wild with terror.

One hand went gropingly to her throat. She wore a necklace, and attached to it was the poison-locket.

"The ghost who walks," she murmured brokenly. "You've mocked me all along. My Sky Band's destroyed!" She had lifted the locket to her lips and opened



She Drank the Poison

the small cap. Quickly, she drank the poison.

It was doubtful if the Baroness suffered pain. Not another word escaped her lips. She slipped downward to the pilot's seat, her head falling back.

The Phantom came slowly forward, and bent down to look at her.

"Dead," he said, haltingly, "by her own hand—as she always said she would do—when the time



She Was Dead by Her Own Hand

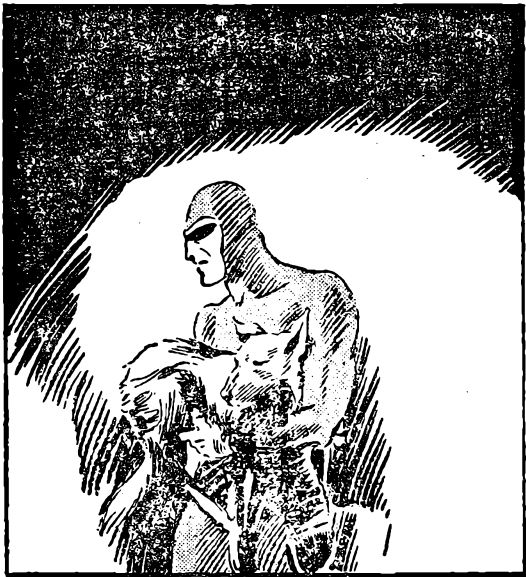
came."

Talking was a terrific effort. The muttered words seemed to be torn from his throat.

It was by sheer will power that the Phantom maintained consciousness as he staggered down the narrow aisle.

"Come on—Devil," he said to the dog who whined at his side. Gritting his teeth, he lifted the animal in his arms.

"We have to—get out of here,"



They Had to Bail Out

he said, lurching forward. "I've got two of her bullets—in me."

It seemed that the cabin door was a great distance away, but the Phantom reached it. He reeled, and, maintaining his hold on the dog, he stumbled out into space.



He Stumbled into Space

CHAPTER X

WAR DRUMS

The Phantom was only vaguely aware of drifting earthward. But, despite his half-conscious state, he succeeded in keeping his hold on the dog.

Together, the two of them came at last to rest on a stretch of sandy beach.

For a time, the masked man re-



He Landed on the Sandy Beach

mained there, too weak to move, while the dog walked about him, licking his hands, making pleading whimpering sounds to awaken his master.

The Phantom heard him, at first dimly, and then consciousness returned.

“We’ve managed to—cheat death a dozen times, Devil,” he said huskily. “But this is—the closest shave—we’ve ever had!”

The plane with locked controls,

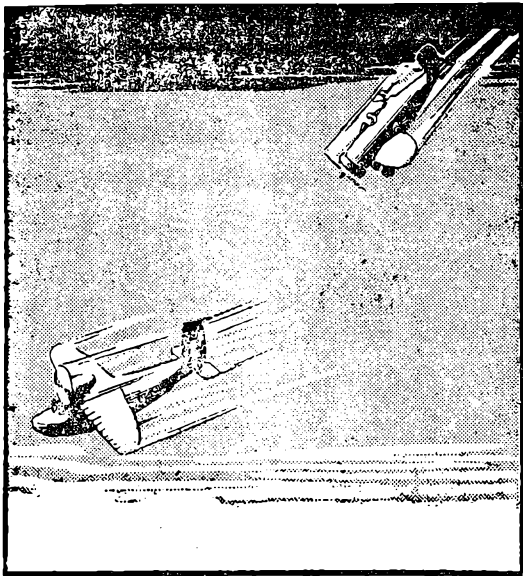


The Plane's Controls Were Locked

meanwhile, was speeding out to sea, carrying the still and lifeless form of the Sky Band leader.

Captain Horton had no way of knowing the tragic things which had happened on this last of the pirate planes, or that a dead pilot sat at the stick.

"There goes the last of the Sky Band ships!" he cried. "Headed out to sea! After it! We can't let it escape!" The pursuit plane gained ground and swooped down on



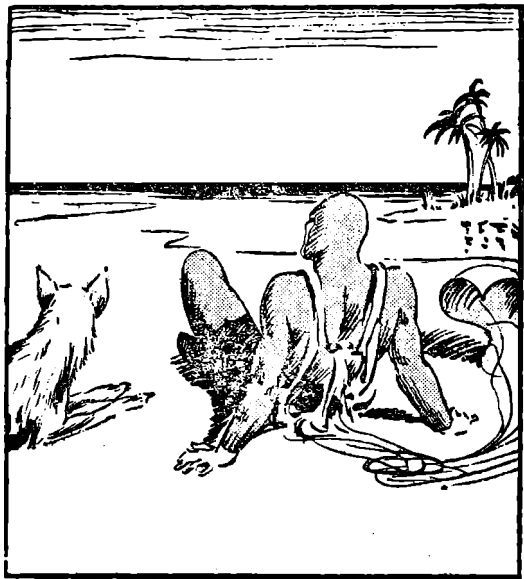
The Pursuit Plane Swooped Down

the ill-fated ship.

But before Horton could reach it, a sudden squall sent the plane and its dead pilot to a watery grave.

On the beach, the Phantom had regained the strength to rise to a sitting position. He was looking out to sea in time to witness the end of the Sky Band.

“That finishes them, fella,” he told the dog at his side. “And the Baroness.” He drew a deep

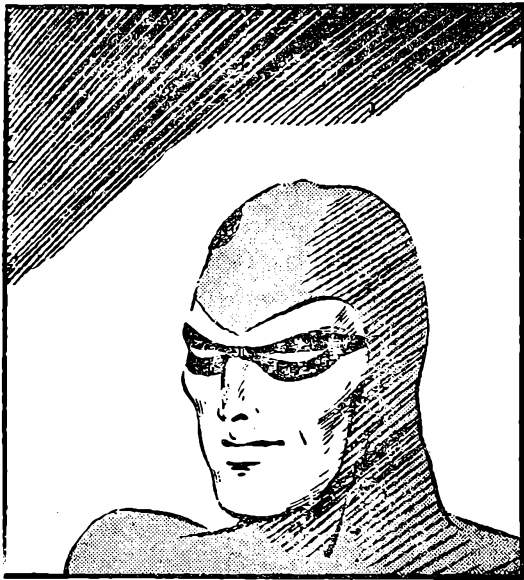


"That Finishes Them, Fella."

breath. "And it finishes the most ruthless piracy I've ever known."

The dog gave a low growl and came closer to his master.

The Phantom, stroking him absently, went on, "And they were all women! It's very strange. but only a woman could have maintained the band as she did. And yet, by double-crossing Salza she betrayed the band and destroyed herself!" Again, he breathed deeply and the dog gave a



"And They Were All Women!"

sharp bark.

What the Phantom had been saying, Devil did not understand, but the tone was grave and it worried him. Also, the dog sensed his master's deep hurt.

The Phantom realized, too, that he was seriously wounded. His head had cleared, but the pain was there, becoming sharper.

It was almost a miracle that he walked the distance, arriving at a lonely military hospital, near the



He Went to a Lonely Hospital

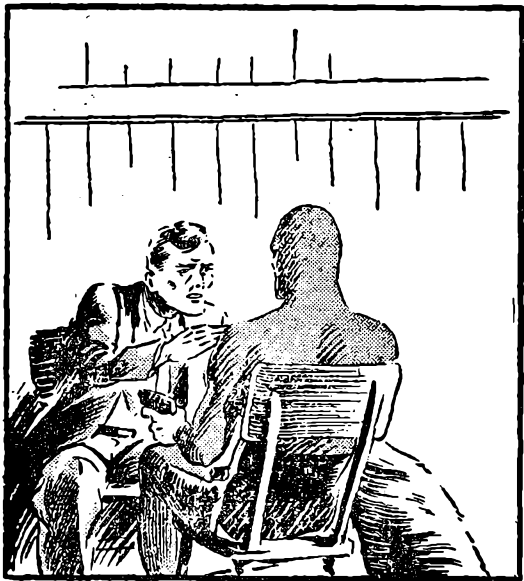
outskirts of Bassein.

The doctor was startled at the sight of the Phantom with the dog at his side.

"This is most unusual," he said, eyeing the gun in the masked man's hand. "Who are you?"

"Just another emergency case that stumbled your way," the Phantom spoke with an effort, seating himself. "Get busy!"

"Two bullets in your chest!" the doctor was saying a few mo-



There Were Two Bullets in His Chest

ments later. "Good heavens, man! How far did you come?"

"Far enough," the Phantom gritted. "Take it easy."

The doctor went on with the examination. He said presently, "As far as I can see, no vital spots were touched. Amazing vitality!"

"Never did see a woman who could shoot straight," the Phantom grunted. And, motioning with the gun, "Well, get going."

The doctor had seen a number



"Amazing Vitality!" the Doctor Said

of strange and unusual cases, but this surpassed anything in his experience.

“But,” he said, “this requires hospitalization.” His eyes went again to the menacing weapon. “And—won’t you put your gun away?”

An unpleasant sound came from the throat of the dog.

“Stop growling, Devil,” the Phantom snapped. “This man isn’t going to hurt me.”



The Phantom Was in a Hurry

Meanwhile, in Calcutta, there were others who suffered, perhaps not physical pain, but both Diana Palmer and Captain Horton were far from being happy.

"I won't believe he's dead!" Diana was telling Horton. "I won't believe it!"

"We captured the survivors of the Sky Band, Diana," Horton told her gently. "He was with the Baroness when her plane went into the sea. I saw it."



Diana Believed He Was Not Dead

The girl continued to shake her head stubbornly. "Even so," she said and caught her voice on a sob, "it doesn't seem true."

"But it is true," Horton said with finality, "and we must accept the truth."

He turned away, his hands clenched behind his back.

"I was a fool," he said. "A stupid fool! I'll never forgive myself for misjudging him. We hunted and hounded him, and all



“I Was a Fool!” Horton Said

along, he was trying to destroy the Sky Band!"

There was silence in the room for a time, broken only by the girl's quiet weeping. At length, she faced facts and accepted the Phantom's death.

"Well—," she looked over at Horton who sat with bowed head, "well, there's no reason for me to stay here any longer, Mel. I'm going home."

Horton rose. "Please stay here,



She Accepted the Phantom's Death

Diana," he begged. "You've still got your life to live. I want to take care of you."

"I'm sorry, Mel." She shook her head. "He died thinking that I did not believe in him, or what is worse, perhaps he died without thinking of me at all. I'm going home."

Despite Horton's pleas, the girl remained firm. Several days later, Horton saw her aboard her ship. Once again, he tried to dis-



Diana Was Going Home

suade her.

"I've got to try to forget," Diana told him. "The last time I saw him, when he kissed that woman, I know now he did it to save my life. Good—good-by, Mel."

Captain Horton was a lonely man as he retraced his steps down the narrow street.

"She's gone," he told himself, "and the Phantom's gone. There's always been a Phantom in the jungles. Even now the war drums



Horton Was a Lonely Man

are starting again, after all the years that he's kept the peace of the jungle."

This new worry held his thoughts as he was opening the door to his rooms. For a moment, he could not believe that the Phantom was actually seated there, the dog beside him.

"Good heavens!" Horton gasped. "Am I seeing things? *You?*"

The Phantom wished to know only one thing. "Where's Diana?"



Was Horton Seeing Things?

he asked.

Still in a daze, Horton told him. "Diana—gone?" The Phantom came to his feet. "Horton, you've got to lend me an army plane. I'll take her off that boat!"

Captain Horton was feeling better, much better. He could smile again.

"You don't waste any time, do you?" he remarked. "I guess I can arrange that." His eyes went over the masked man in a swift glance.



"I'll Take Her Off That Boat!"

“I still haven’t recovered from the shock of seeing you alive and in one piece!”

“To see Diana again!” the Phantom dreamed aloud. “We’ll make it a complete surprise and—” he broke off, taking Horton’s arm. “*What’s that!* Did you hear faint drumbeats?”

“Yes.” Horton’s face sobered. “They’ve been coming steadily now for the past week.”

Neither spoke for a few mo-



They Heard the Drumbeats

ments. They were both listening to the ominous sound.

"The war drums!" The Phantom gritted. "As soon as I turn my back on the jungle, trouble starts!" He paused in an agony of indecision. "But I—I've got to go to Diana."

"Of course you do," Horton agreed. "Don't worry about your jungle people. You go to Diana. *We'll* settle the trouble."

"Your soldiers?" The Phantom



"Don't Worry About Your People."

stood tense, accusing. "All they can do is butcher! For centuries my line has kept the peace of the jungle. Ah, Diana! Well, I've got to go back!"

As in the past, the Phantom had responded to the call of duty. The jungle people had need of him and he had no choice but to return to them.



He Had to Go Back to the Jungle

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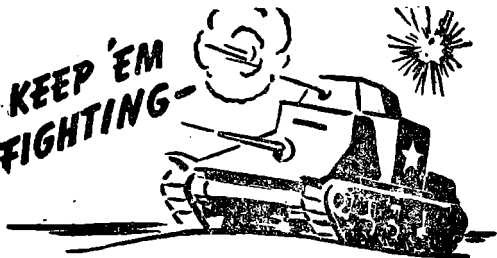
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